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SOME BIRDS OF PARADISE FROM NEW GUINEA.

BY GEO. S. MEAD.

Of that class of the feathered creation to which the term Birds of Paradise has been applied, and which they certainly most appropriately bear, New Guinea with its adjacent islands is the home, or at least the greater number of the dozen or more species of this unrivalled family belong to these regions. Mr. Wallace, a recognized authority on these birds, as well as on the Malay Archipelago, seems to limit their range to the northern side of the mainland. Other travellers, however, have found them on the southern side, as well as in other parts of New Guinea. The Italian naturalist, D'Albertis, for example, encountered several species, notably *Paradisea raggiana*, along the Fly River—a large stream flowing southeast from the mountains of the interior and emptying into the Gulf of Papua, to the right of Torres Straits.¹

Yet the northern side, as Mr. Wallace points out, certainly presents as safe a retreat as could be found for these lovely and much prized treasures of the feathered world. Impenetrable swamps, the rugged coast, impassable mountain ranges, fierce tribes of natives, illimitable forests—all these and other barriers are so many means of protection which it is to be hoped will long preserve a wild life that possesses the fatal gift of beauty, against utter extermination.

There is nothing perhaps but physical difficulties or the subsidence of a fashion that can save birds of paradise from the destruction which a barbarous propensity, and the careless

¹ "On the south coast of N. G. the vegetation is generally of the most luxuriant character, even for the tropics. One vast dark jungle spreads over its muddy shores, abounding in immense forest trees, whose trunks are hidden by groves of sago palms, and myriads of other heat and moisture-loving plants. Unlike the eastern and southern coasts of N. G., the northwestern part is described as being generally covered with timber, but having no underwood or dense jungle, so that it is very easy travelling under the shade of the lofty trees. The country is said to abound with small fresh-water streams, and patches of good grass." Polynesia, p. 175.

cruelty of women seem to make inevitable. Nature herself, therefore, must shield her own from the complacent notion that everything living is subservient to the whim or caprice of civilization or to the savage who ignorantly ministers to it.

These favored regions, besides those of the Aru Islands, where birds of paradise also abound, are rich in vegetation beyond even the usual fecundity of the tropics. Almost as unique, varied and lovely, are other forms of animal life—butterflies, dragon-flies, lizards, insects great and small, and countless tribes of the feathered race.

In the eyes of lovers of the gorgeous, among birds the king bird of paradise, *Cicinnurus regius*, is without a rival. It is indeed of surpassing loveliness, if, as some one says, an adjective so distinctive can properly be applied to any species when all are so lovely. The bird itself is of small size, nor does the plumage stand forth to that extent it reaches in other species, but within this compass the most perfect, soft and dazzling effects of delicate tints are displayed. While the plumage of all the birds of paradise is singularly beautiful, still more beautiful and magical is the play of shifting lights. The least movement on the part of the bird, the slightest displacement of a feather, the turning of a leaf or the letting in of a sunbeam, produces a wondrous and entrancing change. After death the colors pale, in many instances almost immediately, and of course the evanescent hues lose their startling brilliancy. Over the prevailing tint of red on the king bird, "a gloss as of spun glass wavers." The head is of deep orange, the throat cinnabar, the breast snow-white; between the breast and throat is a dividing belt of rich green. Like silk with its sheen and softness is the white breast; white also is seen over each eye. On either side of the lead-colored legs, at times hidden under the wings, tufted, white-tipped feathers, puffed out like the down on the soft powder-brushes ladies use, are to be noted, for they form a curious adjunct to the dress of the male bird. From the tail-feathers a pair of wire-feathers, five or six inches long, project; these are separated at their ends by an equal distance, and are webbed outwardly so as to form two circlelets about the size of a coat-button. Capt. Moresby, in his inter-

esting book, "Discoveries in New Guinea," gives so admirable a description of the king-bird of paradise as to deserve quotation here:

"This bird," he says, "is as large as a small thrush, the back glossy crimson, the head feathers being soft, and deep in tone like velvet, the throat crimson, and separated from the pure white breast by the wide band of green. It has the long wire tail of all birds of paradise, terminating, however, in two circular feathers, about the size of a sixpenny piece, of a burnished green. But its peerless ornaments are two small feather fans of intense emerald color, set in the upper joint of the wing, and capable of being spread or folded at pleasure."

Not unlike the best known of all the birds of paradise, *P. apoda*, is the red-bird, *Paradisea sanguinea*. It cannot, however, be considered as the peer in beauty, its resemblance consisting chiefly in the fall of long plumes from the back, giving that appearance, so characteristic and so attractive, as of a cataract of feathers falling in a maze of wavy lines and spray. Where these soft plumes are golden in *Apoda* the red-bird has a deep crimson. Yellow prevails on the head and neck, extending a short distance on the back. A yellow band passes across the breast, flanked by green and brown. All these tints blend into each other, the line of division never being closely marked excepting on the throat. A corrugated arrangement of short velvety feathers gives a singular appearance to the head; this and the long filaments reaching beyond the loose wing plumage serve in making it one of the most striking ornaments of the bird creation.

The size of *Sanguinea* or *Rubra* is about that of a robin, perhaps a little larger, and its favorite resort the recesses of Waigiou Islands.

Paradisea apoda, the great paradise bird, has become a familiar object of admiration in museums of natural history and collections. In no other bird is the coloring so rich and the blending of browns, purple, green and orange so alluringly beautiful. Add to this the long, curving fall of plumes behind, and one of the most entrancing spectacles animate nature has to show is vouchsafed.

This is the species early brought to Europe by travellers, and even made an object of commerce. No wonder that, deprived of its sturdy, somewhat ugly legs and feet, people fabled the lovely creature to be not of earth but aerial, never settling on gross, material things, nor living on terrestrial food, but passing its halcyon existence above mundane growths, or like matchless Belinda's lock, wafted to the skies :

"A sudden star, it shot through liquid air,
And drew behind a radiant trail of hair."

Which last line, it has always seemed to me, fairly well describes the appearance of a shafted bird of paradise while in flight.

In his travels along the Fly River, N. G., in 1872-5, D'Albertis found (what he considered new to science) *Paradisaea raggiana*, so named by Mr. Sclater, after Marquis Raggi, of Genoa. This beautiful bird of paradise the Italian explorer described by its differences from *P. apoda* and *P. minor* rather than by any special marks of its own. It is less in size than the great-bird, but in luxuriance of plumage almost its equal. In opulence of colors, too, it vies with the loveliest. A golden belt widening above divides the green throat from the ruby breast ; a splash of the same color appears on the wings, while the back is untinged. Red prevails on the side wings running along the floating plumes. It is very probable that *P. apoda* and *P. raggiana* interbreed ; possibly other varieties. D'Albertis notes several evident instances of hybrids, and names the characteristic markings of those specified—the yellowish tinge at the back of the throat, the small wing feathers banded with gold, etc. The velvety softness of the feathers is as observable in *Raggiana* as in all birds of paradise, while the exquisite intermingling or suffusion of vivid colors, although at the same time these are quite distinct, is just as inimitable. Long, curving wire-shafts adorn this species also.

Of less flaming colors than the last mentioned species, although the transition of hues is even still more wonderful, and lacking the flowing train of plumes and caudal appendages of other members of its kind, the *Lophorhina superba* or

atra hardly falls behind its congeners in beauty and attractiveness. Instead of the radiant splendor of the *Apoda* or *Raggiana*, the colors of *Superba* are darker but marvellously rich, —purple, violet, green, bronze, blue—ever varying and shifting in changing lights, the whole shot over with satin sheen, while silken gleams run fitfully along the compact feathers which, nevertheless, never lose their velvety softness. While to compensate for waving plumes, we have a gorgeous green bifurcated shield for the breast and two pseudo wings or wing coverings raised or depressed at will. The head glistens as with scales of dark green or blue, according to the reflections. It is not without the singular crests or protuberances which distinguish certain birds of this family, and it is not unlikely that the feathers are at times also erected when the bird is excited or pleased.

The unique adornment, however, of *Superba*, not omitting the curious extensions of metallic green athwart the breast, is the half-united pair of mock wings spreading out when raised, from the shoulders above the head and shadowing the back and sides. The color is black, but blazing with lustre, so that as the light strikes the tips of the feathers they become bronze or blue, or even green, almost iridescent, always resplendent. In size, shape and indescribable coloring, this mantle forms one of the most remarkable combinations of feathers which even a bird of paradise can show, this, too, on a little creature not more than nine inches in entire length.

D'Albortis informs us that the natives of New Guinea call the bird *niedda*, "from the sound of its notes." If this is so, its voice is materially different from the discordant cry of other *Paradisea*.

We hear from the incomparable emerald bird of paradise (*Apoda*), for instance, only a hoarse "wok, wok," or a succession of cawing, unmusical sounds.

In the Golden bird of paradise, *Paradisea sexetacea* or *Parotia sefilata*, we find another example of dark, rich clothing in contradistinction to the gay apparel of other species of the race. The somewhat misleading appellation, golden, is derived from the flashing colors of the gorget or escutcheon

below the throat. The rest of the bird is invested in more neutral tones—black, purple, bronze and green—lighting up into metallic brightness or deepening into dark, funereal velvet with every movement.

As the superb-bird is glorious with great shoulder-crests waving like a duplicated fan, and a two-fold breast shield, so the Golden has its own peculiar mark of uniqueness in the six long threadlike shafts projecting, three on either side, from the head, and terminating in an oval web. These wire feathers are movable and can be thrust at pleasure straight out or thrown back upon the body. The head is still further ornamented with the usual erectile feathers brushed back, as it were, from the beak; some gray in coloring or white shine like jewels or precious stones. On the sides, soft, massive pectoral plumes, jet black, pass beyond and over the wings, covering them when lowered and almost concealing the rounded tail as well.

EXPLANATION OF PLATES.

PLATE XXIX. From Brehm's Thierreich.

- Fig. 1. *Paradisea apoda*.
- Fig. 2. *Parotia sefilata*.
- Fig. 3. *Cicinnurus regius*.

PLATE XXX. From Brehm's Thierreich.

Selœucides alba.

PLATE XXXI.

Paradisea raggiana Scl. from the Natural History of New Guinea.

PLATE XXIX.



1. *Paradisea apoda*. 2. *Parotia sefilata*. 3. *Cicinnurus regius*. From Brehm's Thierleben.

PLATE XXX.



Seleucides alba. From Brehm's Thierleben.

PLATE XXXI.



PARADISEA RAGGIANA
(*From Gould's Birds of New Guinea*)